

## **Testimony of Patricia Leyland, Paraprofessional**

### **Re: HB 5465 An Act Concerning Certain Family and Medical Leave Benefits for Certain Municipal Employees**

The Labor and Public Employees Committee  
February 1, 2011

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Zalaski and members of the Labor Committee. My name is Patricia Leyland and I am a paraprofessional in the Math Lab at Jack Jackter Intermediate School in Colchester. I'd like to tell you about my 2009-2010 school year. It proved to be the most challenging of my 12-year career as a paraprofessional.

It was much like any other school year until I was diagnosed with Hodgkin's lymphoma. It took quite a few sick days from work and many doctor's appointments before I even got my diagnosis and started my chemotherapy. I worked as much of my work week as I could handle through my chemotherapy treatments until May 2010. In May I had a toxic reaction to one of my chemo drugs and was hospitalized for a week. At this point my oncologist wouldn't allow me to return work because my immune system was compromised.

Knowing that paraprofessionals aren't entitled to FMLA, I wondered if I would have enough sick days left to get me through the end of the school year and hold my position. By the end of the school year in June, I had used 55 and a half sick days.

I have been employed by the Colchester Board of Ed for 12 years, so I was fortunate to have accrued enough sick days to get through the end of the school year and preserve my job. However, without being entitled to FMLA, just imagine the additional stress to one's convalescence with the burden of fear over possibly losing your job, your income, and perhaps even the health insurance that you need in order to get well.

I thought I would be able to return to work at the beginning of the 2010-2011 school year. My doctor had other plans for me. I wasn't allowed to go back to work until September 22<sup>nd</sup> 2010, again using more sick days. I now have 7 and a half sick days left to get me through June 2011. I know I will have to use future sick days for an upcoming CT scan, more checkups and more blood work at the cancer center. I still fear I may use up my sick days and my job will be in jeopardy by June.

I urge you to please consider enacting HB 5465. This would allow hard-working devoted paraprofessionals the peace of mind to know that should they need to take time off from their jobs to care for themselves or their family members, their job will be waiting for them when they are able to return to work.

I value my job and I hope that I can continue to help more of my students learn to love math. Either way my story does have a happy ending, I am cancer survivor!

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I'd be happy to answer any questions you may have.